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AUTHOR Polizzi, Kenneth G.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

School based decision making (SBDM) has become one of the of hottest issues in education today. In SBDM the local governing body consists of parents, teachers, community members, and school administrators responsible for the legislative duties of running their school. Since most decision-making programs are geared for use in business settings rather than school settings, a training model to improve team decision-making based on observations of seven school-based decision-making committees in seven deregulated schools was developed. The model develops a new set of attributes that characterize the typical decisions faced by such councils. Stages of the decision-making process are described, which include: (1) stating the problem; (2) specifying and rephrasing the problems; (3) identifying available information; and (4) determining the support needed for implementation. Finally, the decision is evaluated and necessary changes are made. (LMI)

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Designing A School-Based Decision-Making Training Program Through Real-Life Experiences

Kenneth G. Polizzi
Dianne D. Horgan
Carol P. Etheridge
Thomas C. Valesky
Foundations of Education
Memphis State University

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Abstract

School based decision making (SBDM) has become one of the hottest issues in education today. To establish the meaning of the concept, SBDM "reflects a shift in power and decision making away from central administrators and toward the local school personnel and community" (Horgan, Etheridge, Valesky, & Smith, 1991, p. 1). In SBDM, the local governing body consists of parents, teachers, community members, and school administrators responsible for the legislative duties of running their school. In order for the local school personnel to be effective decision makers, and because schools implementing SBDM are under microscopic scrutiny, training in decision making is often necessary to ensure a program's success.

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Therefore, a training program tailored to meet the special needs of these schools is needed. While most well-developed participative decision-making programs are geared for use in business settings rather than school settings, this training program is unique in that it has been designed using empirical data consisting of real life experiences observed in seven inner-city schools specifically for use in school settings.

Problem Being Addressed

Team decision making can be a non-productive experience. Much of this "lack of production" can be attributed to disagreements among team members, lack of enthusiasm, time constraints, lack of decision-making skills, etc. However, many times these reasons may not be the case. Very often, inability to be good decision makers may be caused from a lack of understanding of exactly how and when to use which skill. As a result, councils can sometimes waste time, energy and good intentions, and little gets accomplished. At times, participative decision making can be slow and inefficient. Our training model focuses on how to be participative in such a way that good decisions are made in a timely fashion.

The Proposed Model

Our model, the Team Decision Making model (TDM), is partially based on Vroom and Yetton's (1973) participative decision making training program which is used in industry. The focus of their model is on how and when leaders should use participative decision making (Horgan, 1991). In contrast, our TDM model is specifically tailored for use in school settings. Through our observations of 7 school based decision making committees in 7 deregulated schools, our model was developed according to actual issues/decisions addressed by the committees. With these issues/decisions in mind, we developed a new set of attributes that characterize typical decisions facing SBDM councils. It is our belief that good decision making involves diagnosing decisions and learning which strategies work

best in particular situations.

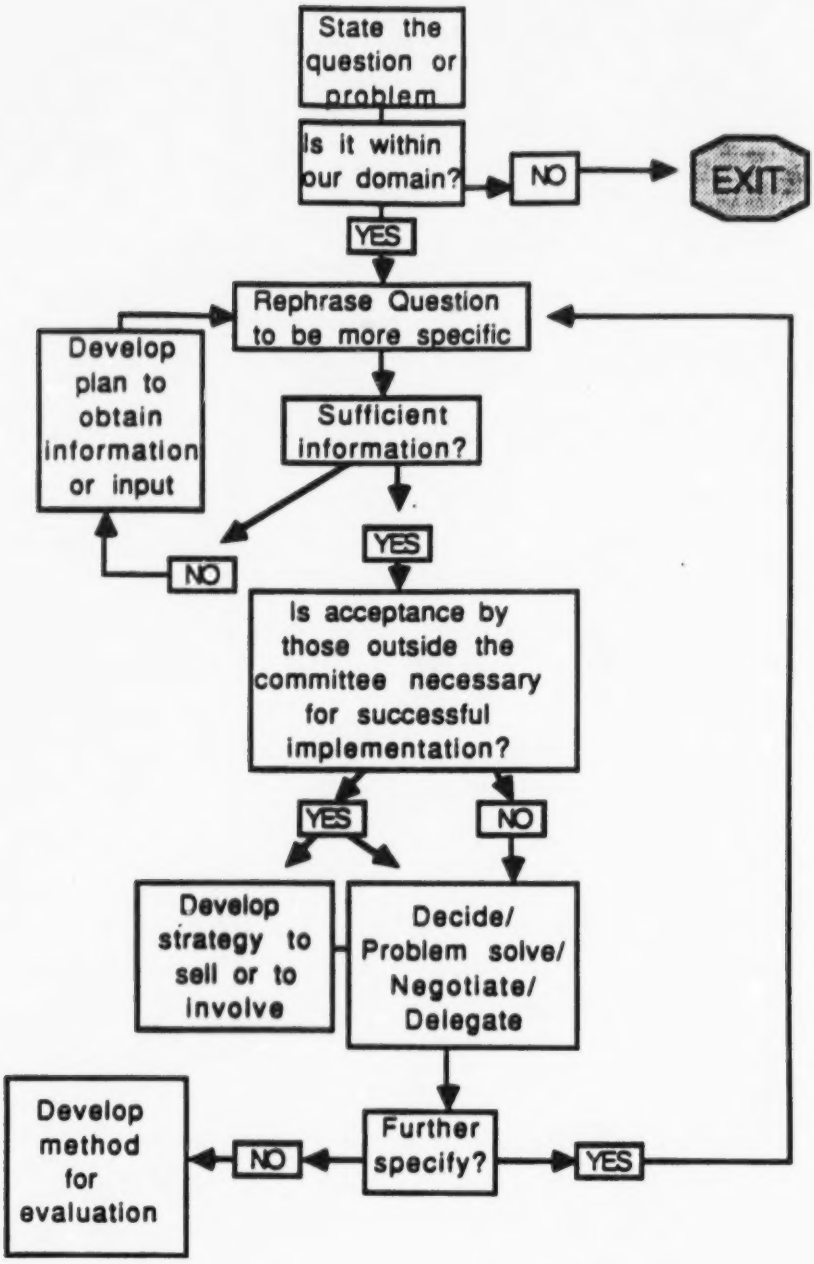
Pre-Training

Before the actual training begins, a pre-training exercise is conducted in order to assess each participant's profile, that is, his or her decision-making skills. Because each participant possesses individual but specific skills, it is important to recognize what skills each team member brings to the group. This is accomplished by having each participant analyze a set of prototypical cases by answering sets of questions corresponding to the following attributes: (1) is the problem within the council's legitimate domain; (2) is the problem specific enough to be dealt with effectively at this time; (3) does the group have sufficient information to make a decision; and (4) what kind of support will be necessary from those external to the committee to ensure implementation of the decision. Each participant will receive a computerized analysis of his or her responses to those cases showing which attributes each participant attended to and which ones were overlooked.

The Training Process

The participants are then taken through the model, addressing each step and learning what problems occur when committee members fail to attend to each attribute. In addition, participants learn how to identify which problems are and are not within their decision-making domain, how to move from a general issue to a specific question, how to obtain necessary and sufficient information, when to seek support from and when to involve those outside the council, how to sell decisions, how to make efficient decisions, negotiate, delegate, and finally, evaluate decisions.

The first step in the model (refer to diagram on the next page) is to clearly state the issue/problem. Once this is accomplished, the first attribute can be addressed: Is the problem within the council's legitimate domain? This attribute is often overlooked because some members think that every decision is the responsibility of the


State the question or problem
Is it within our domain?
NO
EXIT
YES
Rephrase Question to be more specific
Develop plan to obtain information or input
Sufficient information?
NO
YES
Is acceptance by those outside the committee necessary for successful implementation?
YES
NO
Develop strategy to sell or to involve
Decide/ Problem solve/ Negotiate/ Delegate
Develop method for evaluation
NO
Further specify?
YES

council. However, there are certain issues/questions which can't be decided on solely by the council. When the issue is recognized as being outside of the council's domain, it is waived for decision making by the council or appropriated to the responsible committee.

Second, is the problem specific enough to be dealt with effectively at this time? If not, then the problem should be rephrased in such a way that it can be addressed in a yes/no type of format. The whole idea here is to break the issue down into several components, thus allowing for movement from general issues to specific strategies. Also, this should be done before any discussion takes place on an issue.

Third, does the group have sufficient information to make a decision? This step of the process is to determine whether or not a decision can be made based on existing information. If not, then the team must develop a plan for obtaining the necessary information, rather than wasting time discussing the issue any further. If sufficient information is available, then the team can proceed with the process.

Fourth, what kind of support will be necessary from those external to the committee to ensure implementation of the decision? In other words, is acceptance by those outside the committee necessary for successful implementation? Making the decision seems to be the easy part: Implementing it is another story. The team must first determine if external acceptance is necessary or not for implementation of the decision. If, for example, a decision is reached on a curriculum issue and the teachers choose not to implement the decision, then it is very likely that the decision will not succeed. In this case, external concerns were not considered. When acceptance is necessary, strategies to either sell the decision to or involve those external to the committee need to be developed. We have found that in SBDM the best strategy is to create the feeling of "ownership" of the decision (Horgan et al., 1991). By doing so, everyone has the feeling that their views and opinions are being taken seriously and are valuable to the issues/problems at hand. On the other hand, if acceptance is not necessary, then the committee can be pretty

confident that their decision will be successfully implemented without the need to develop selling/involvement strategies.

The committee is now ready to make a decision, or perhaps delegate the issue/problem to some other committee. If not, then the issue/problem may need to be further specified, then exited back to the rephrasing step of the model. If further specification is not necessary, and a decision has been reached, then a method for evaluating the decision should be developed.

An evaluation of the decision will show whether or not your strategies have worked. Consider these 4 steps: (1) look at your goals and ask yourself what it is you are trying to accomplish; (2) identify the people who can provide you with data which will help you keep track of the outcomes from your decisions; (3) determine the type of evaluation needed; and (4) decide how to proceed with further decision making. This is an opportunity to learn how effective your decision making is. Remember, there is always room for IMPROVEMENT.

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